

Taylor University

## Pillars at Taylor University

---

2020 Website News Stories

Website News Stories

---

6-25-2020

### Pre-Art Therapy Major Directs Art Projects for Children with Down Syndrome

Taylor University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pillars.taylor.edu/webnews-2020>

---

# Pre-Art Therapy Major Directs Art Projects for Children with Down Syndrome

BY: Emily Pawlowski

PUBLISHED: Jun 25, 2020 11 am



At Taylor, practicums play an important role in helping students gain real-world experience in the fields they've studied in the classroom. Recent graduate Leah Groeling had a chance to practice her lessons as a [Pre-Art Therapy major](#) by volunteering last year at Gigi's Playhouse.

## Using Art to Aid Abilities

[Gigi's Playhouse](#) is a national nonprofit organization that provides free programs for people with Down syndrome. People of all ages are able to participate in groups that focus on their physical health, education, personal lives, and the way the world views them.

Groeling served as Art Director and Coordinator at Gigi's in the Indianapolis, Indiana, location. She was in charge of planning and leading daily art projects for attendees to work on. These activities gave children an opportunity to express themselves and also served a therapeutic purpose. Creating art helps develop fine motor skills, which is important for those with Down syndrome.

## Building Creative Connections

While Groeling appreciated her time at Gigi's, it wasn't always easy. Since all of the programs were optional, encouraging people to participate was difficult at times. She recalls one student who wanted nothing to do with her art projects—he would sit in the corner and refuse any staff member who attempted to get him to join the group. After a few days of no success, Groeling decided to ask him herself.

After taking some time to get to know him, Groeling learned he was a big fan of the Fort Wayne Tincaps baseball team. She made him a button with the Tincaps logo on it and convinced him to take it home with him. A week later, she noticed the student wearing that button.

“With excitement I approached his mom and told her how surprised I was that he was wearing the button,” Groeling recalls. “His mom told me that he loved the button so much; in fact, the night before he had worn it out to dinner and lost it. His family looked for it everywhere and would not leave without it!”

After that, Groeling and the student spent a lot of time together. He began to open up through art and shared his drawings with her.

“I believe this is a prime example of what art can be,” Groeling said. “Art is a form of communication. It's a way of expressing ourselves and our interests. It brings people together.”

## Prepared for Graduate School and Beyond

Groeling felt well prepared to work at Gigi's thanks to her classes at Taylor. She'd spent the last several years preparing for this exact line of work as a [Pre-Art Therapy](#) major.

Pre-Art Therapy, which is a part of the [Art Department](#), prepares students for a master's degree in Art Therapy with a combination of classes focusing on art techniques and psychology.

The projects and variety of tasks Groeling has worked through at Taylor also gave her greater confidence in her abilities. Taylor's liberal arts approach means that she has experienced a wide variety of training opportunities.

“I have loved how Taylor has prepared me for the world beyond the classroom,” Groeling said. “Although I haven't taken any business classes at Taylor, I have learned from my classes how to be professional and prepared for whatever task I am given.”

Thanks to this combination of classroom and real-world experience, Groeling feels equipped to continue pursuing a career in art therapy. She's ready to help others, both physically and mentally.